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Soccer tour coup for U.S.

U.S. girls' team plays Canada in tonight's championship match at Baker

Saturday, April 28, 2007

By **TOMMY HICKS**
Sports Reporter

International -- actually, internacional -- soccer arrives at Mobile's Baker High School today with three matches marking the conclusion of the 2007 Futbol Internacional tour.

According to Scott Spencer, director of the Alabama Youth Soccer Association, which is sponsoring the event, today's matches and the entire 2007 Futbol Internacional tour that made stops in Birmingham, Huntsville, Tuscaloosa, Decatur and Montgomery before reaching Mobile not only represents a coup for the state of Alabama, but for the U.S.

The tournament features the United States 21-Under national girls' team and the national girls' teams from Trinidad-Tobago, Canada, Mexico, China and Argentina.

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Today's matches begin at 2 p.m. with Argentina meeting Trinidad-Tobago in the fifth-place game. At 5 p.m., Mexico plays China for third place. And at 7:30 p.m., the championship match features the unbeaten United States team against Canada.

"It's really big to have it America, not just in Alabama," Spencer said, noting that only two other non-Olympic, non-World Cup, multi-national soccer tournaments are taking place, and those are scheduled in South Korea and Portugal.

"This is a huge event when you look at it in a global context."

General-admission tickets are \$16 per person and available at the stadium. Gates are expected to open at noon.

Spencer said exhibition soccer matches in Birmingham last year were well-received and played a role in this tournament coming to the state. "We wanted to do something a little bigger," Spencer said. "This opportunity became available, we were able to put together support, including corporate support, and we were able to get (the tournament) here."


Nichelle Gainey, president and CEO of sports marketing and consulting firm SilverStone International, said the tournament will raise Alabama's worldwide soccer image.

"You can't really gauge that until after the fact," Spencer said when asked how the tournament will affect youth soccer in the state. "But there's a lot more people talking about the game today (than before the event started)."

While the U.S. team is not the national team, it features players who "will be looked at" as future national team participants, Spencer said. The teams representing the other nations, Spencer added, are "veteran teams," with many of their players slated to perform on their country's national team.

Each of the 20,000 Alabama Youth Soccer Association members will receive a free ticket to today's matches. The first 5,000 registered youth players from other states will also be eligible for free tickets. Tickets are also available online at www.alabamayouthsoccer.org. Children younger than 4 years old will be admitted free.

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